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AERONAUT.

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> — Ausonio mixtum sanguine surgit.
> AEN. XII. 838
>
> In weaker modern verse we strive,
> The Ausonian strength perchance to give.

In the decline of Rome, when the claſsical poets were failing from the theatre of her present overgrown conquests, and future ruin, Ausonius stands, the last upon whom the spirit of her bards appears to have descended in its purity. Although, in their imitators in after days, we discern a few gleamings of that hallowed splendor, which once rested so brightly upon the Italian horizon, the spell is gone, and the illusion ceases. They can no longer soar,

Mæonii carminis alite,

on which Virgil's aspiring muse was borne to the topmost cliff of Parnassus. The notes of the Sicilian ~~pipe~~ reed perished as it fell from the hands of Tityrus. The fire of the Alcaean measures was quenched when Horace expired. In the authors of the middle ages, if ever a tone is recognised which recalls the music of purer masters, 'tis but a "lingering echo heard remote;" Fame jealous of her proudest favourites, will not suffer them to have a rival.

Such being the case, Ausonius becomes interesting to us, as the last of Roman minstrels. And although far inferior to his predeceſsors, his verses acquire a value from their relative situation. Viewed in this light, a brief account of his life and writings, with a few attempts at giving specimens of his style in English, may not prove uninteresting to our readers.

* Decius Magnus Ausonius was the son of a celebrated physician of the same name, and was born at Bordeaux in the year ^ His early proofs of premature ability consoled his father for the loſs of an elder son, on whom he had doated. His grandmother and maternal aunts superintended the instruction of his childhood; and he was afterwards placed under the charge of Cecilius Argicius Magnus, his uncle, a celebrated Rhetorician. At the age of thirty he was chosen Grammarian, to teach at Bordeaux; and upon the Rhetorical chair becoming vacant, he was promoted to that post. Here

* Scaligeri Ausonius.

he continued until the Emperor Valentinian sent for him to become the tutor of his sons Gratian and Valentinian. He followed them to the field; and, in the intervals of active service, he devoted his leisure hours to the muses. He composed during this period his epigrams of Sulpitilla Bissula a beautiful captive, who fell into his hands among the spoil. By the Emperors Valentinian & Gratian, he became successively quaestor, praefect & consul. We have some fine poetry of , on his accession to the latter offices. He was subsequently proconsul in Asia and vicarius of the African diocese. After Gratian had been destroyed by the tyrant Maximus, he was compelled to remain in the palace by the latter; Maximus perished by the fate of most tyrants, and Ausonius obtained leave from Theodosius to retire into his paternal home. Here he died at an advanced age.

In his second Edyl, he gives an account of his ~~self~~ father and his habits. "I am" says he "neither poor nor rich; frugal but not sordid. My diet, my habits, my manners have ever been the same. The Latin is my natural tongue, but I am well enough acquainted with the dialect of Attica, for the cultivation of eloquence. I instructed without reward & studied to gain the good opinion of the wise, but as my own judge, did not flatter myself. I have distributed the times and seasons for the different offices of life, with due regard, avoided law suits, and neither increased nor diminished my patrimony. No one has perished by my judgement or my testimony. I have envied none; I have shunned covetousness and deceit. I held the violation of truth in the same light as perjury. Neither faction or conspiracy has entangled me. Friendship I have sincerely cultivated. I have consi-

-dered him happy, not who has whatever he desires, but who desires not what fate refuses. Without idle curiosity or garrulousness, I contemplated what lay in my path and have not pryed into secrets. I have invented no false reports of the good; and if I know them true, I have kept them silent. I have kept anger, castlebuilding and unnecessary anxiety at a distance, with the vain joys of vice. I have forsworn crowds and mobs, and the pretended friendships of princes. I have always esteemed it laudable, to be guilty of no sins of omission, and have preferred good morals to laws. Prompt to anger, I have restrained my temper, and have always suffered penance for levity. For nine lustres, without infidelity I have enjoyed the company of my wife. We have had four sons. The first daughter died in her infancy; the last son in his rude adolescence, yet not rude in knowledge.

The eldest son attained the summit of honor; praefect in Gaul, Libya & Latium; calm, mild, serene in his look, voice and aspect, like his father in soul and in mind."

We have made this long extract; because it is a fine character amiably drawn by filial affection; and because it is evident the son made his father his example and pattern. The concluding sentence however, would have become better from the biographer of our author, than from himself. Ausonius (the younger) was as constant to his wife as his father had been before him. He lost her at the age of twenty eight; and lived single and continent for forty five years after her death, when he paid the debt of nature.

In characterising the writings of Ausonius, there is comparatively little in their bulk which intitles him to the praise of a poet; and a great deal which does him no credit as a wit. The Grammarian is too visible throughout. He degenerates often into puerility without sportiveness, and toils without amusement or instruction. In his numerous verses ending with monosyllables, there is no wit; ~~except~~ and ~~in~~ the Cento Nuptiale, ~~which~~ is too obscene for fame. One would suppose that his account of the monosyllabic letters was written for his scholars who were learning their Alphabet; for he informs them, that Z upon its feet is an N: that T looks like a mast with the cross yard; and that Θ is I with two handles.. These verses ending in monosyllables afford us however a few gleanings, on subjects with which we are but darkly acquainted.— The

Grammarian is visible too, in the strange mixture of Greek and Latin, of which Ausonius is so fond -

That our author was a Christian, is disputed by his commentators; and the pieces attributed to him of a Christian character are said to be spurious - Leaving them out of the question, therefore, let us hastily glance over the other

His epigrams have not the elegance of Catullus or the spirit of Martial. Many of them from the Greek, are the best in the collection. They are finished in their kind, and their antitheses are exact. But from some, of a nature too gross to mention, we gather the existence of a state of society, in which vices were made the subjects of ridicule, which at present call down the axe of law, and excite the horror of mankind.

Passing on to the Idyls, which he has thus denominated, we know not why, the second has been already mentioned; The third is a spirited account of a contented mind. We recognise here as in many other places, the manner of Horace. Indeed we often find many words together, which are met with in the same order in the works of that writer. The fourth is a serious epistle, in a lively manner to his grandson. The sixth and fourteenth are most poetical. We cannot perceive as much to admire in his verses on Bisula as Scaliger seems to have done. The eighth and ninth contain fine language, and are among the first specimens of his talent for the music of numbers.

– prome coruscum
Sol aeterne caput; solitoque illustrior, almo
lumine purpureum jubar exere lucis eoae.

The tenth, "Mosella" is claſsical, harmonious, and has much good poetry in it; but it is too long for translation in a work of this nature, and we have avoided fragments, wherever we could.

The Griphus consists of an enumeration of the powers of the number 3, and its different applications. Scaliger, after making darkneſs ten times more profound, exclaims with triumph, "what can be clearer than this?" Then follow the monosyllabic verses, which, as we have remarked, may be read with much labour, by the curious for miscellaneous information. The three following Eclogues are imitated from the Greek. Our readers are requested not to behold our attempts at translation with too fastidious an eye. The construction is throughout epigrammatic. Terseneſs is constantly studied, and the antitheses lose their force, by being often neceſsarily paſted or placed at a greater distance.

In our next number we shall insert translations -

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Note - We may remark, as evidences of the decline of taste, in the works of Ausonius, germs of the quaintnesses with which the Monks afterwards amused themselves - The twenty ninth epigram is evidently meant for rhyme.